

Billy the Buck

By HENRY
WALLACE PHILLIPS

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ONE day when I was working on a Dakota ranch the boss, a person by the name of Steve, urged me to take an ax, go forth and chop a little wood, which I did.

The weather was ideal—a Dakota fall; air vital with the mingled pleasant touch of frost and sun, like ice cream in hot coffee, and still as silence itself. I had a good breakfast; was in excellent health and spirits. The boss could by no means approach within a mile unperceived, and everything pointed to a pleasant day. But, alas, as the Copper Lined Killdeer of the Rockies sings, "Man's hopes rise with the celerity and vigor of the hind leg of the mule only to descend with the velocity of a stout gentleman on a banana peel."

On reaching the grove of cottonwoods I sat down for a smoke and a speculative view of things in general, having learned at my then early age that philosophy is never of more value than when one should be doing something else.

I heard a noise behind me, a peculiar noise, between a snort and a violent bleat. Turning, I saw a buck deer and from the cord and bell around his neck recognized him as one Billy, the property of Steve's eldest boy. He was spoken of as a pet.

This was the touch needed to complete my Arcadia, the injection of what at the time I considered to be poetry into the excellent prose of open air life. Who could see that graceful, pretty creature and remain unmoved? Not I, at all events. I fancied myself as a knight of old in the royal forest, which gave a touch of the archaic to my speech.

"Come here, thou sweet eyed forest child!" I cried. And here he came.

At an estimate I should say that he was four ax handles, or about twelve feet, high as he up-ended himself, brandished his antlers and jumped me. My ax was at a distance. I moved. I played knight to king's bishop's eighth, in this case represented by a fork of the nearest tree, a wise and subtle piece of strategy, as it resulted in a drawn game.

My friend stood erect for awhile, making warlike passes with his front feet, which, by the way, are formidable weapons as a man would care to have opposed to him; then, seeing that there was no sporting blood in me, he devoured my lunch and went away, a course I promptly imitated as far as I could. I departed.

Hitherto I had both liked and admired Steve. His enormous strength, coupled with an unexpected agility and an agreeable way he had of treating you as if you were quite his own age, endeared him to me. When I poured out my troubles to him, however, rebuking him for allowing such a savage beast to be at large, he caused my feelings to undergo a change, for instead of sympathizing he fell to uproarious laughter, slapped his leg and swore that it was the best thing he'd ever heard of and wished he'd been there to see it.

There are probably no worse teases on earth than the big boys who chase the cow on the western prairies. They had "a horse on the kid," and the poor kid felt nightmare ridden indeed. If I were out with them some one would assume an anxious look and carefully scout around a bunch of grass in the distance, explaining to the rest that there might be a deer concealed there, and one could not be too careful when there were wild beasts like that around. Then the giggling rascals would pass the suspected spot with infinite caution, perhaps breaking into a gallop, with frightened shrieks of "The deer, the deer!" while I tried to look as if I liked it and strove manfully to keep the brine of mortification from rolling down my cheeks.

I didn't let my emotions take the form of words, because I had wit enough to know that I could not put a better barrier between myself and a real danger than those husky lads of the leather breeches and white hats. For all that I had a yearning to see one of them encounter the deer at his worst. I did not wish any one hurt and was so confident of their physical ability that I did not think any one would be, but I felt that such an incident would strengthen their understanding.

This thing came to pass, and, of all people, on my arch enemy, Steve. If I had had the arrangement of details I could not have planned it better. Because of my tender years the light chores of the ranch fell to my share. One day every one was off, leaving me to chink up the "bull pen," or men's quarters, with mud against the cold of approaching winter. Steve had taken his eldest boy on a trip to pick out some good wood.

Presently arrived the boy, hatless, running as fast as he could fear, the breath whistling in his lungs. "Come quick!" was the message.

It seems the deer had followed the couple, and when the boy fooled with his old playmate the deer knocked him down and would have hurt him badly; but that his father instantly jumped into the fray and grabbed the animal by the horns with the intention of

twisting his head off. The head was fastened on more firmly than Steve supposed. The powerful man thought it would be an easy matter to throw his antagonist. What he did not at all take into account was that the buck was both larger and stronger than he. Though raised on a bottle, the deer had grown into a splendid specimen of its kind. He was by long odds the largest deer I ever saw.

Well, Steve got the surprise of his life. It didn't take him long to see the battle was all against him; that the best he could hope to do was to hold his own until help arrived; so he sent the boy off hotfoot. Although his power for a short exertion was great, Steve was in no kind of training, having allowed himself to fatten up and being an inordinate user of tobacco. Per contra, the deer felt freshened and invigorated by exertion. That is the deuce of it in struggling with an animal—he doesn't tire!

I knew that Steve was in sore trouble, or he never would have sent for help. The boy's evident distress denied the joke I might otherwise have suspected, so I grabbed up a rope and made for the grove, the boy trailing me. I should have waited to get a gun, but I didn't think of it. Those were the days when I could run, when it was an exhilaration to sail over the prairie. The importance of my position as rescuer, which any one who has been a boy will understand, lent springs to my feet.

It was well for Steve that mine were speedy legs. When I got there his face was gray and mottled, like an old man's, and his mouth had a weak droop, very unlike the devil-may-care Steve. The two had pawed up the ground for rods around in the fight. The deer's horns beneath where the man gripped them were wet with the blood of his torn palms. Steve's knees, arms and head were trembling as if in an ague fit. He was all in physically, but the inner man arose strong above defeat. "Here's—your—deer—kid!" he gasped. "I—kept—him—for you!"

I yelled to him to hold hard for one second, took a running jump and landed on Mr. Buck's flank with both feet. It was something of a shock. Over went deer, man and boy. I was on my pins in a jiffy, snapped the noose over the deer's hind legs, tangled him up anyhow in the rest of the riata and snubbed him to the nearest tree. Then Steve got up and walked away to where he could be ill with comfort. And he was good and sick.

When he felt better he arose and opened his knife, swearing that he would slit that critter's throat from ear to ear, but Steve, Jr., who before this had arrived on the scene, pleaded so hard for the life of the pet that big Steve relented and Mr. Billy Buck was saved for further mischief.

That afternoon two of us rode out and roped him, "spreading" him between us as we dragged him home. He fought every step of the way. My companion, a hot headed Montana boy, was for killing him a half dozen times. However, feeling that the deer had vindicated me, I had a pride in him and kept him for a timely end. We turned him loose in a corral with a blooded bull calf, some milk cows, work steers and other tame animals. "And I bet you he has 'em all chewing the rag inside of twenty-four hours," said my companion.

That night Steve made ample amend for his former mirth. Indeed, he praised my fleetness and promptness of action so highly that I was seized by an access of modesty as unexpected as it was disorganizing.

The next day Steve stood on the roof of the shed at the end of Billy Buck's corral. Suddenly he straightened up and waved his hat. "Deer and bull fight!" he called. "Come a-running, everybody!" We dropped our labors and sprinted for the corral, there to sit upon the shed and watch the combat. Steve didn't know what began the trouble, but when I got there the young bull was facing the deer, his head down, blowing the dust in twin clouds before him, hooking the dirt over his back in regular fighting bull fashion and anon saying, "Bh-ur-ur-oor!" in an adolescent bass profundo, most ridiculously broken by streaks of soprano. When these shrill notes occurred the little bull rolled his eyes around as much as to say, "Who did that?" and we, swinging our legs on the shed roof, laughed gleefully and encouraged him to sail in.

The bull, having gone through the preliminaries of his code, cocked his tail straight in the air and charged. The buck waited until he was within three feet; then he shot sideways and shot back again, his antlers beating with a drumstick sound on the bull's ribs. "Baw-aw!" said the bull. Probably that hurt.

Again bull faced buck. This time the bovine eye wore a look of troubled wonderment, while one could mark an evil grin beneath the twitching nose of his antagonist, and his bleat had changed to a tone which recalled the pointing finger and unwelcome "Huh-ha!" that greets misfortune in childhood. "I told you so!" it said. The bull, however, is an animal, not easily discouraged. Once more he lowered his foolish head and braved forth like a locomotive.

But it would take too long to tell all the things Billy Buck did to that bull. He simply walked all over him and jabbed and raked and poked. Away went the bull, his erstwhile proudly erect tail slewed sideways in token of struck colors, a sign of surrender disregarded by his enemy, who thought the giving of signals to cease fighting a prerogative of his office. Away went the old cows and the work steers and the horses in a thundering circuit of

the corral, the horned stock bawling in terror and Billy Buck "boosting" every one of them impartially. We cheered him.

"Gad, I'm glad I didn't slit his wind-pipe!" said Steve. "He's a corker!"

Billy drove his circus parade around about six times before his proud soul was satisfied. Then he took the center of the ring and bellowed a chant of victory in a fuller voice than he had given before, while the other brutes, gathered by the fence, looked at him in stupefaction.

Only once more did Billy Buck figure in history before he left us for a larger field in town, and on this occasion, for the first and last time in his career, he got the worst of it.

A lone Injun came to the ranch, a very tall, grave man, clad in comic picture clothes. A battered high hat surmounted his block of midnight hair, and a cutaway coat built for a man much smaller around the chest held his torso in bondage. As it was warm on the day he arrived, he had discarded his trousers. A breech cloth was plenty leg gear, he thought. He bore a letter of recommendation from a white friend.

"Plenty good letter," said he as he handed the missive over. I read it aloud for the benefit of the assembled ranch.

It ran:

This is Jimmy-Hit-the-Bottle, the worst specimen of a bad tribe. He will steal anything he can lift. If he knew there was such a thing as a cemetery, he'd walk fifty miles to rob it. Any citizen wishing to do his country a service will kindly hit him on the head with an ax.
JACK FORSYTHE.
(Continued in Monday's paper)

Here is something that is worth many dollars to every farmer to know: Sprinkle lime in your stock tank and not a particle of scum will form on the water. When the lime loses its strength scum will begin to form, which may be twice during the season, wash out your tank and repeat the dose. It is cheap, not only harmless but wholesome, keeps the water sweet and saves the live stock.

Following the Flag.

When our soldiers went to Cuba and the Philippines, health was the most important consideration. Willis T. Morgan, retired Commissary Sergeant U. S. A., of Rural Route 1, Concord, N. H., says "I was two years in Cuba and two years in the Philippines, and being subject to colds, I took Dr. King's New Discovery for Consumption, which kept me in perfect health. And now, in New Hampshire, we find it the best medicine in the world for coughs, colds, bronchial troubles and all lung diseases. Guaranteed at Charles Rogers, druggist. Price 50c and \$1.00. Trial bottle free.

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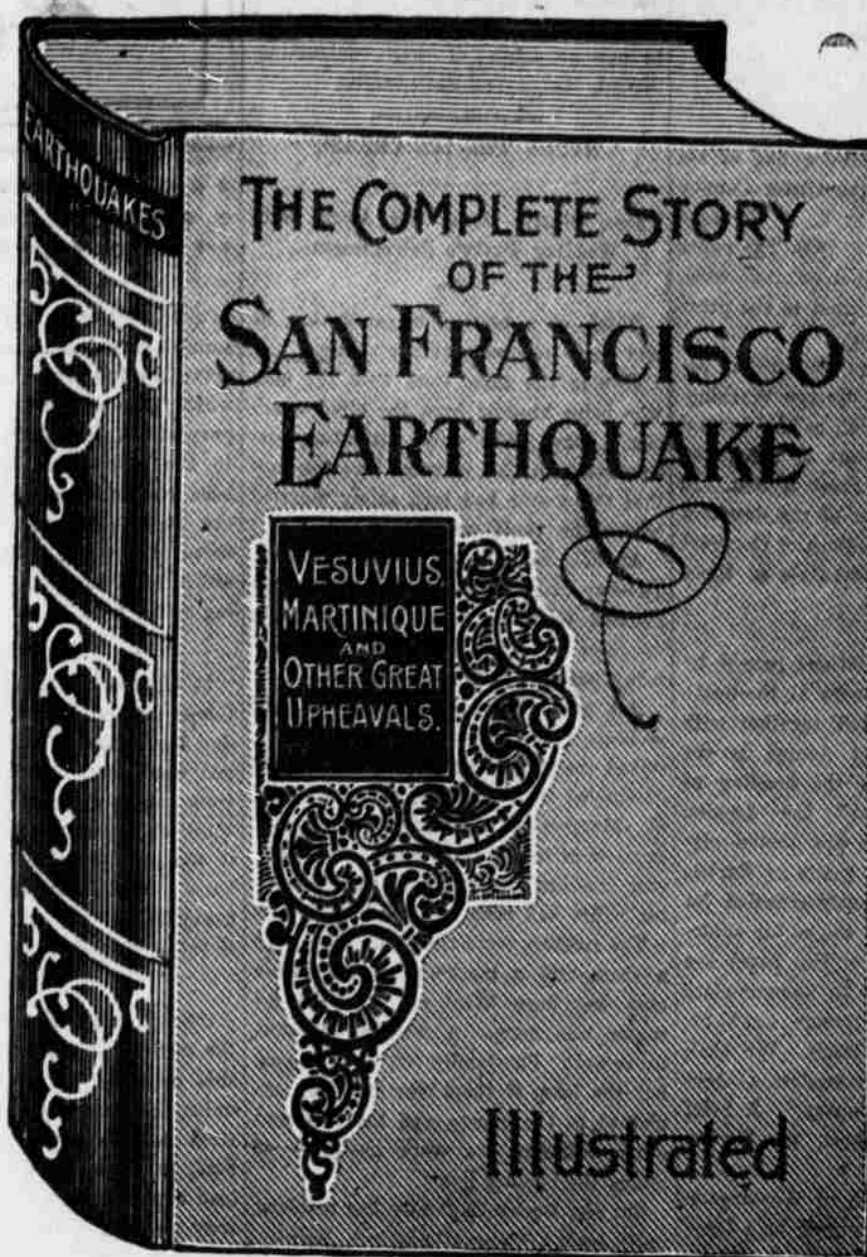
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